A reference can be sent to the TRAI to give certain recommendations in this regard. Accordingly, we will proceed.

DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY: Sir, it was mentioned in the reply that from 1.5.2003 to 31.1.2004, the Access Deficit Charges stood at Rs. 7851 crores. So, I would like to know as to how it came down so substantially to Rs. 1,900 crores in 2007-08. What are the reasons behind this? This is number one.

Secondly, the hon. Minister has also mentioned that ADC earned by the BSNL will be utilized for providing and maintaining the basic service at affordable rates in urban, semi-urban and rural areas. So, I would like to know, specifically, as to how much amount are they going to spend on rural areas.

SHRI A. RAJA: Sir, the USO fund collected as on 1.4.2008 is around Rs. 20,00,000 crores. The amount that has been spend is, of course, very low. It is only Rs. 6371.435 crores. The remaining amount is lying with the USO Statutory Fund. I must say before the House that this Fund is non-lapsable. It is being derived from the Consolidated Fund of India. Simply because this year this fund is not spend does not mean that this amount wil go to the Finance Ministry or any other head. The amount is lying with us. That is why we proposed to put up 18,000 towers at a stretch within a couple of years. All these funds will be utilised for the purpose. For the first time we have taken another decision. Since the broadband connectivity in this country, that too in remote areas are very low, for the first time we decided that this unspent money can be utilised for broadband connectivity in rural areas also.

SHRI MATILAL SARKAR: Sir, as far as the mobile services are concerned, BSNL is not providing mobile services to the international border areas. Whereas, Sir, there are some private companies who are providing mobile services up to the end point of the border areas. There is a double standard. Why is BSNL not going to extreme border areas? Others are going. People are suffering. People are inclined towards BSNL services.

SHRI A. RAJA: With due respect to the hon. Member, there is a misconception in the question. The Home Ministry for security reasons in the border areas announced that this is a buffer area; there should not be any mobile operation. Of course, I have come across this. Even in the meeting of the NDC, some of the Chief Ministers in the Northern States in the presence of the Prime Minister submitted that BSNL is not working, Indian telephones are not working, wherein the other countries' mobile services are working in the border areas. It is our stand that has been taken by the Home Ministry that buffer zones should not be used for mobile services. Wherein, foreign country's signals are coming. This matter is being taken up with the Home Ministry as to how we can abvoid this multiplicity of signals for the security of this country. So, there is no question of private operators being permitted and BSNL is not permitted.

Missing ship carrying Indian Crew

*449. SHRI AMAR SINGH:††
SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI:

Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

†† The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by (Shri Amar Singh).

(a) whether it is a fact that M.V. Cargo vessel which was carrying 25 Indian crew was reportedly missing since February 18, 2008 while on its way from Nororossisk in Russia to Bartin in Turkey;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government had received any petition from the families of the crew;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) the action taken thereon?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) to (e) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) and (b) The Panamanian Flag vessel, MV Rezzak, which had a crew of 25 Indian nationals sailed out from Novorossisk, Russia, on 17th February, 2008 at 0110 GMT. She was bound for Bartin Limani in Turkey at 0900 hours local time on 18th February, 2008. The vessel reportedly relayed her last position to the owners on 17th February, 2008 at 0900 GMT. At this position, the vessel was halfway through the voyage in a position between Novorossisk and Turkish Coast, approxomately at a distance of 90 miles from Novorossisk and Turkish Coast. The Directorate General of Shipping received an information on 19th February, 2008 that the vessel was overdue for its discharge port of Bartin Limani, Turkey.

(c) to (e) Yes, Sir. Petitions have been received from the families of the missing crew. The matter has been taken up with the relevant national and international agencies. India being the substaintially interested State, an officer from the Directorate General of Shipping was deputed to Turkey and Russia to participate in the casualty investigation alongwith the investigator of the flag State Panama. His report is a awaited.

श्री अमर सिंह: सर मैं, आपके माध्यम से माननीय मंत्री जी से यह जानना चाहूंगा कि क्या यह सही है कि एम॰वी॰ रेज्जाक जहात समुद्र की यात्रा के लिए फिट नहीं था और रूस के नोवोरोस्सिस्क में पोर्ट अथॉरिटी के इंवेस्टिगेशन के अनुसार जहाज में मात्र 37 कमियां पाई गई थीं और सरकार ने डंतपजपउम के सवे को अलर्ट करने के लिए, क्या इस कम्पनी के ऊपर कोई कार्यवाही की है?

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Sir, before 'M.V. Razaak' was formed by the four States, at that particular point of time, there were about 38 defects. Thirty-eight defects were identified and it was told to the master and the administration has rectified about 35 problems. Only three were left and those three were about emergency lights. There were some problems in the DG set and the engine room was not clean. When the master sailed out of a particular port, it was reported as 'very, very bad weather' and it was about sub 0° temperature in that particular area. Another master, belonging to another vessel, has reportedly warned this particular master, 'not to sail and go to a sheltered placed.' Unfortunately, this particular master has sailed the vessel and, finally, it was reported that it was sunk, because of locating of some material from a particular site 25 Indian were on the ship. Just because they have located all these debris, we presume that the vessel would have sunk. But, investigation is going on. We have already deputed our surveyor. He is part and parcel of the investigation team.

श्री अमर सिंह: सभापति महोदय, मेरा दूसरा सप्लीमेंटरी क्वैश्चन यह है कि सरकार यह बताए कि अगर उसे ऐसा लगता है, वहं नउम कर रही है कि जहाज डूब गया है, तो जिस कम्पनी ने एमवी रेज्जक जहाज के लिए कर्मचारी उपलब्ध

कराए थे, क्या उस कम्पनी के खिलाफ कोई केस दर्ज हुआ है? जहाज पर जो कर्मचारी नियुक्त थे और सम्भवत: जो डूब गए हैं, आप स्वयं कह रहे हैं, उनके नजदीकी रिश्तेदारों को आपने मुआवजा देकर अपने सरकारी दायित्व का निर्वहन किया है या नहीं या आप उसके लिए भी इन्तजार कर रहे हैं कि जब पक्की रिपोर्ट आ जाएगी, तभी आप मुआवजा देंगे?

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Sir, I am very sorry to say this. I am only saying what has happened. This particular vessel is not belonging to India; it is not listed in our registry. The owners are not the Indian citizens. The operators are also not the Indian citizens. If the vessel is listed under our Flag, we can take action. It is a foreign vessel. If the accident has taken place in our waters, definitely, we can take action. But, it is not so. So, as per the IMO, we have deputed our representative to be a part and parcel of investigation team. I can only say that the DG, Shipping, has already issued a warning to all our seamen not to take up jobs in foreign vessels unless that particular manning agency is registered in India. This kind of advice we can give. But, at the same time, we feel sorry for the tragedy. If any compensation is to be given, it has to be given by the particular registered foreign company, not by India.

श्री अमर सिंह: सभापति महोदय, यह तकनीकी उत्तर है। आप मुझे क्षमा करें। आपने यह कह कर इति श्री कर दी है कि यह भारत में रजिस्टर्ड नहीं है। यहाँ विदेश मंत्री जी भी बैठे हैं। कैबिनेट की सामूहिक जिम्मेदारी होती है। मैं यह जानना चाहता हूँ कि क्या आपने विदेश मंत्री जी से या विदेश मंत्रालय से यह कहा है कि जो जहाज डूब गया हे, जहाँ से listed है, वहाँ से पता करे कि उसमें कितने भारतीय नागरिक और कर्मचारी हैं? उनको न्याय दिलाने के लिए क्या आपने कोई समन्वय किया है, co-ordination किया है? आप खड़े होकर तकनीकी उत्तर दे देंगे कि हमारे यहाँ लिस्ट नहीं है, लोग मर गए, तो हम क्या करें! यह कोई उत्तर नहीं हुआ। यह बड़ा ही अमानवीय उत्तर है।

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Sir, the facts are like this. I have received petitions from all the 25 families of the missing crew. What are they saying? They are saying that a particular vessel was not sunk. It could have been hijacked. They wanted the Government of India to find out how it had been hijacked. And they wanted to have a CBI enquiry. I have already requested the DG, Shipping, to look into it.

AN HON. MEMBER: The Ministry of External Affairs should also be involved in this.

SHRI T.R. BAALU: I am not saying that the vessel is hijacked. It was the family members of the missing crew who have written a letter and saying that the vessel might have been hijacked. Now, the enquiry is going on. Once the enquiry is over, we will be able to find out what has happened. After that we will find out what sort of help is necessary. If any help is necessary, we will extend ...*(Interruptions)*...

श्रीमती सुषमा स्वराज: सभापति जी, देश में जो महंगाई का मामला चल रहा हे, उसे देखते हुए ...(**व्यवधान**) एनडीए के लोगों ने बाहर मानव-श्रृखंला बनाई ...(**व्यवधान**) मानव-श्रृखंला बनाई ...(**व्यवधान**)

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Question Hour is in progress. ...*(Interruptions)*... The Question Hour is in progress. ...*(Interruptions)*... Please let the question be completed. ...*(Interruptions)*... The Question Hour is in progress. ...*(Interruptions)*...

श्रीमती सुषमा स्वराज: सभापति जी, दर्द की श्रृखंला के रूप में ...(**व्यवधान**) मानव-श्रृखंला बनाई गई ...(**व्यवधान**)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please resume your places. ...*(Interruptions)*... The Question Hour is in progress. ...*(Interruptions)*... The Question Hour is important. ...*(Interruptions)*...

श्री एस॰एस॰ अहलुवालिया: सभापति महोदय, पिछले हफ्ते एक प्रश्न का जवाब देते हुए ...(**व्यवधान**) कृषि मंत्री या प्रधान मंत्री महोदय इसका जवाब दें ...(**व्यवधान**) माननीय मंत्री जी ने जो जवाब दिया है ...(**व्यवधान**)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please allow the Question Hour to proceed. ...*(Interruptions)*...

श्री एस॰एस॰ अहलुवालिया: मंहगाई दिन-पर-दिन बढ़ती जा रही है और गरीब लोगों के लिए दो समय की रोटी भी नहीं मिल रही है ...(**व्यवधान**)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please allow the Question Hour to proceed. ...*(Interruptions)*...

श्रीमती सुषमा स्वराज: महोदय, प्रधान मंत्री जी जा रहे हैं ...(**व्यवधान**) प्रधान मंत्री जी जा रहे हैं...(**व्यवधान**)

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO STARRED QUESTIONS

Small Savings Scheme of Post Offices

*443. SHRI A. ELAVARASAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there is negative growth in Small Savings Scheme of Post Offices with huge withdrawals over deposits into such schemes in the last year;

(b) whether it is also a fact that this negative growth will lead to a drastic deficit in National Social Security Fund (NSSF);

(c) if so, whether Government has analysed the reasons for this negative growth;

(d) the steps taken by Government for the growth of this scheme; and

(e) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI A. RAJA): (a) Yes, Sir. More withdrawals (including redemption on maturity) are noticed than deposits overall in Small Savings Schemes of Post Offices during the financial year 2007-08 upto February, 2008.

(b) Department of Posts does not deal with National Social Security Fund (NSSF). However, given the position of the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF), the present trend of deposits is unlikely to lead to drastic deficit in the Fund.

(c) to (e) The trend in collections, *inter-alia,* reflect investor's preference for other alternative savings instruments. Over a period of time, investment options available have increased both in number and variety, offering a wider choice to investors for their savings. De-regulation of the interest rates relating to banks, financial institutions and debt markets have also contributed to directing the flow of savings into instruments other than small savings schemes of the Government, which are subjected to administered interest rates.

With a view to sustaining investor's interest in small saving schemes, the features of the schemes are reviewed from time to time and various improvements and amendments in the schemes are introduced. Some of the recent measure include:—

(i) The benefit of Section 80C of the Income Tax Act, 1961 has been extended to the investments made under 5 Year Post Office Time Deposits Account and Senior Citizens Savings Scheme, with effect from 01.04.2007.

(ii) Introduction of a Bonus at the rate of 5% on the deposts made under Post Office Monthly Income Account (POMIA) Scheme on or after 8th December, 2007 upon the maturity of the deposit.